

# Committee System in Nigerian Public Tertiary Institutions: Problems and Way Forward

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**Abstract:** The committee system is a part and parcel of the tertiary institutions. The committee is the micro-element representative of the entire system cut out to carry out special assignments that are key to the development of the institutions. Committees in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria are faced with many problems hindering their effectiveness. This paper examined the various problems hindering the effectiveness of committees in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Content analysis method was adopted to select the print and online literature on committee system in the higher institutions. The paper concludes that problem solving, fast decision making and participation in school governance and promotion of external relationship are the vital benefits of the committee system to the tertiary institutions. Also, the paper identified inadequate funding, overlapping membership, frequent cancellation of meetings, delay in the decision-making process, non-implementations of committee's recommendation and bias in selection of committee members are some of the problems hindering the development of committees in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. The paper concluded by recommending adequate funding for committees, constant capacity building for committee members, merit selection of committee's chairs and members as well as implementation of committee's report recommendations.

**Keywords:** Committee, Tertiary Institutions, Problem, Universities.

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## Introduction

Tertiary education is an educational system that advances the implementation of teaching programme, research programme and community service programme for the socio-economic and technological development of the country. Tertiary education is an education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institutes (NTI) according Federal Republic of Nigeria national policy on education (2013). The national policy went further to identify some goals of Tertiary Education to include: contribute to national development through high level manpower training; provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians; provide high quality career counselling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work; reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market; promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service; forge and cement national unity; and promote national and international understanding and interaction (FRN, 2013).

Tertiary Educational institutions shall pursue these goals through: Quality student intake; quality teaching and learning; research and development; high standards in the quality of facilities, services and resources; staff welfare and development programmes; provision of a more practical based curriculum relevant to the needs of the labour market; generation and dissemination of knowledge, skills and competencies that contribute to national and local economic goals which enable students to succeed in a knowledge-based economy; a variety of flexible learning modes including full-time, part time, block release, day-release, and sandwich programmes; access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund); Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) that is well structured, coordinated and supervised; maintenance of minimum educational standards through appropriate regulatory agencies; an all-inclusive credible admissions policy for national unity; supporting affordable, equitable access to tertiary education through scholarships and students' loans; inter-institutional co-operation and linkages; and dedicated services to the community through extra-mural and extension services (FRN, 2013).

Tertiary institutions have become very complex organizations because of the alarming rate of expansion in number and population both at the students' level and the staff level. The administration of tertiary education is very bureaucratic in its nature. Because of the large size of the administrative structure of higher educational systems, clear-cut divisions of labour/roles are generally outlined. Since it is not quite possible for the Vice-Chancellor to be present everywhere, responsibilities and authorities are delegated. Committees are formed in the tertiary institutions to help in carrying out some assignments. Committees within the tertiary institutions are made up of small bodies or a small group of persons that have been put together for carrying out some specific assignments with the aim of achieving some institutional goals. So, the realization of the objectives of tertiary education hinges to some extent on the effectiveness of the committees within the institutions. Ogbonida *et al* (2013) submitted that most committees in Nigerian Universities (State Universities inclusive) are fraught with some challenges which sometimes render their activities counter-productive. It is imperative to examine the problems hindering the effectiveness of committee system in the Nigerian tertiary institutions.

### **Objective of the Paper**

The specific objectives of this paper include; to examine:

1. Concept of Committee system
2. Problems hindering effectiveness of committees in Nigerian tertiary institutions;
3. Suggest way forward

### **Theoretical Framework**

Systems theory hold that an organization is a social system made up of integrated parts. The theory was propounded by a biophysicist Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in 1920. The system was seen as a series of interrelated and interdependent parts in such a way that the interaction of any part of the system affects the whole system. That is, one part of the system must interact and depend on the other parts around it to function effectively. The system theory is relevant to education system because education system (school) is a system and the concept of interaction and interdependence of parts with the education system like all other social systems has identical properties with the other system.

This study is anchored on system theory. The tertiary institutions are looked at in terms of social system as complex interactive examined structurally and operationally. The theory is of immense help to this project work as the realization of the objectives of institutions (university) depends on all the part and parcel of the system which committees are part of them. The effectiveness of the committees directly and indirectly affects the entire system. So, tertiary institutions administrators and managers should prioritize the needs of the committees and provide all resources needed to carry out their assignment for them.

## Concept of Committee System

The committee is very important to the survival of the tertiary institutions. The committee is the micro-element representative of the entire system cut out to carry out a special assignments that are key to the development of the institutions. Committee has been described as a small body or a small group of persons that has been put together for carrying out some specific assignments with the sole aim of achieving some institutional goals (NOUN, 2012). Nwachukwu in Ogbonida et al (2013) defines committee as 'a device for achieving co-ordination of activities and sharing information among various departments and divisions of an organization. Parkinson (2014) viewed committee as a small body of people appointed by a parent body to discuss certain matters with a view to making group decisions on behalf of or group recommendations to the parent body. It can be rightly inferred from the above that anybody or organization appointed or established by another body or any group of people elected for a purpose(s) can be regarded as a committee. In that sense, boards, commissions, council, senate, tribunal, task forces can be regarded as committees.

There are different kind of committee according to Ogunmodede (2000) they are: (i) the permanent committees which meet at specific periods, (ii) ad-hoc committees which are raised to deal with a particular matter after which they are dissolved such as task forces and investigation panels and (iii) joint committees, this is peculiar only to tertiary institutions. Also, Oduneye (2000) listed two major types of committees and they are: standing or structural committees and ad-hoc or temporary committees. Standing or structural committees refer to the committees which are permanent in nature though staffed by different individuals at different times, carry out same duty over and over again. The second type is called ad-hoc committee which is charged with a one-time task and is dissolved as soon as the task is completed. Committees have equally been classified as academic when referring to committees and Boards of Senate whereas council committees and boards are referred to as non-academic committees.

The Nigerian university system utilizes committees in the decision-making process under the collegial arrangement with the university governing council and senate at the summit. The council is in the management of finance, property and personnel, while the senate is theoretically supreme with respect to academics. It is from these two bodies that all other committees derive their *raison d'être*. Each public university in Nigeria has not less than (40) forty standing committees with which they make decisions that facilitate the proper management and growth of the University system (Ogunruku 2012). For NOUN (2012), universities in Nigeria are run through committees and some of these committees are: Finance and General Purpose Committee, Development Committee, Appointment and Promotion Committee (A&PC), Admissions Committee, Academic Planning Committee, Committee of Deans, Research Grants Committees, Research and Publication Committee and Ceremonies Committees, Etc. The Senate Boards and Committees include: Senate, Business Committee of Senate, Entrance Board, Examination Committee, Board of School of Post-graduate Studies, Scholarship Committee, Research Grants Committee, and Advisory Committee on Foreign students, Ceremonial Committee, Careers Board, and Committee on Award of Honorary Degrees, Publications Committee, Library Board, Timetable Committee, Calendar Editorial Board, University Sports Council, and Appraisal/Assessment Committee. Other advisory boards and committees of the university include: Committee of Deans, University Consultancy Management Board, Board of the University, and Division of General Studies among several others (Ibukun in Ogbonida Obaino and Emmanuel, 2013)

Each of the universities has according to NOUN (2012) between twenty and sixty committees. Each of such committees is supposed to specialize with regard to the terms of reference and focus of activities. In practice however, there are disturbing overlaps and duplication of efforts. The principles of delegation and limited authority are operated to enable the apex committee, the Senate and the Governing Council to coordinate the various activities of the subordinate committees, which are brought to their attention. The thrust of committee activities is decision making.

There is different element of committee system in the tertiary institutions. NOUN (2012) outlined eight main elements which include: the membership or composition of the committee; the leadership, chairmanship or convenership; the frequency or regularity of committee meetings; the time taken for a particular decision to be reached (one month, one year, four years, etc); the records or minutes of proceeding (accuracy of documentation); the adequacy or inadequacy or availability of administrative support (e.g. competent secretary, information bank or precedents regulations, etc); consistency or inconsistency of application of rules and regulations, or other basis of reaching decisions; the timeliness or frequency of follow-up actions and implementations of decisions, decision extracts: communication of decisions etc).

The committee system is designed and structured to have composition. According to NOUN (2012), the composition of committee system for universities, the Vice Chancellor is the chairman. He could, however, delegate the chairmanship to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor or to any other person. Consequently, the personal and administrative competence of the Vice-Chancellor will reflect on the leadership and general membership of the major committees. This is why it is important to appoint Vice-Chancellors with experience, knowledge of, and ability in university administration. He will therefore be in a position to appoint committee chairman with requisite qualifications or abilities.

In term of committee leadership, NOUN (2012) stated that leadership requirements of an efficient committee are in the direct province of the chairman or the convener. The chairman or convener dictates the direction of arguments and the guiding or overriding considerations in any issue under debate.

The chairman and the secretary are the most important; they provide necessary leadership for the committees in punctuality, alertness, recollection of precedents and other numerous regards. Where the chairman is unable or afraid to give leadership to the committee, the secretary will, inevitably drift away from its terms of reference. The chairman who introduces irrelevant or frequent digressions into the agenda of a meeting will find the meeting very long and often boring. Other members may turn the business of the committee into story telling sessions.

### **Benefits of Committees in Tertiary Institutions**

The committee system is playing a serious important roles in the development of the tertiary institutions especially the universities. Some of the vital roles of the committee include; problem solving, fast decision making and leading to participation in school governance and promotion of external relationship.

### **Solve problems**

Committee system in the tertiary institutions has helped in solving many problems that may have confronted the institutions. Musa (2014) acknowledged that committee system in the higher institutions is providing solutions to problems of management and academic issues. The committees in the tertiary institutions are instrumental to providing solutions to problems and issues affecting the institution' development. There are many types of committees with their areas of problem solving skills. Forsyth (2006) posits that in essence, solutions to problems or questions can often be more easily solved when different group members recall how things were handled in the past and relate it to the present task. According to Ede (2000) the use of committees is specifically important and justifiable in Nigerian universities because the instrument by which the universities were established prescribed specific committees as part of the governmental structure. Some boards and committees of the Council include: Finance and General Purpose Committee, Tenders board, Building, Works and Site Committee, Joint Council/Senate Committee on Endowment Fund, Appointments and Promotions Committee (Senior Administrative and Technical Staff), Board of the University Bookshop, Board of the College of Medicine.



## Fast Decision Making

The committee system has been described as a vital institutional arrangement that facilitates and improves internal decision-making in States and other Nigerian universities. The committee system serves as an avenue for expressing, communicating and recommending policies and curriculum changes to the Faculty, Dean, Provost, Vice-chancellor and other Heads of Units of the university. It has been very useful in enhancing university governance and management as the decisions made by various committees are derived from a democratic process although committees' recommendations do not sometimes influence the final decisions made by the University Council and Senate particularly if they are in conflict with those of the university administrative team. (Ogbogu 2013). Odia & Omofonwan (2007) submitted that committee system is useful for harnessing information for effective decision-making and planning, tapping expertise and ensuring that everything is taken into consideration. Okojie (2007) opined that the development in science and technology compels universities to be involved in more decision-making processes which can only be handled by a committee of experts who are specially trained and experienced in making strategic decisions. Forsyth (2006) posits that the committees are "effective decision-makers" who perform better than the individual in the act of decision making. Forsyth further stresses the effectiveness of the group (committee) in that groups undeniably have advantages over individuals as the collective power of a group is incomparable with individual capability. A group can draw on the collective memory of all its members that is the group has wider memory to work upon while an individual making a decision can only draw on his or her own memory. Ogbogu (2013) did a research on federal universities in all the six geo-political zones of the country. The Role of Committees on the decision-making process in Nigerian universities. The study revealed that committees are vital institutional arrangements that facilitate and improve internal decision-making in Nigerian universities. The study further revealed that the use of committees enhance university governance and management as the decisions made guide the judgment of university administrators.

## Participation in governance

The committee system is a means of sharing governance with the university governing bodies as well as an avenue for ensuring the full participation of staff in the decision-making process (Ogbogu, 2013). The committee system is intended in Nigerian State universities to enhance managerial accountability and to maintain the democratic procedures for representation of views set out in the university charter and statutes. Committee system therefore provides a more solid basis for administrative decisions because it allows the university to benefit from the expertise and experience of faculty and other staff members (Bowen and Shapiro in Ogbogu, 2013). Odia & Omofowami (2007) further noted that the committee system is useful for democratizing participation, devolution of responsibility and fostering a sense of general belonging on the part of everybody in the university adding that committee system also ensures a means of practicing administrative and executive openness, handy for doing basic work while preserving authority where it belongs such as the Senate and the Council. Eno-Ibanga (2005) did a study on the impact of committee system on university management in Benue State of Nigeria. The results showed that the committee system encourages participation of a large number of staff, and that committee system is a vital tool for improving decision-making process in university management and that there will be trust and confidence if the committee decisions are faithfully implemented.

## Promote External Relations

Ogbomida<sup>1</sup>, Obano, & Emmanuel, (2013) observed the External Relations Committee in most Nigerian Universities has helped to globalize the higher educational system through various exchange programmes between and among other countries in the world. This Committee has facilitated and is still facilitating international exchange programme for both students and staff. Through this committee, the cooperation with other universities of the world has yielded tangible gains in form of supply of textbooks, science and laboratory equipment to some Nigerian

universities. Personal training and research grants are among the benefits the external relations Committee has brought to most Nigerian Universities through international networking. Other benefits of Committee system in administrative governance of Nigerian Universities include according to Ogbomida<sup>1</sup>, Obano, & Emmanuel, (2013):

- 1) Democratization of university system. There is devolution of powers from the Governing Council especially the Vice-Chancellor. Delegation of authority to members of the Committees has increased commitment and collective responsibilities to the promotions of the ideals of the system. This has invariably occasioned the stable academic calendar especially in Federal Universities in Nigeria.
- 2) The principles of checks and balances militating against the abuse of authority by top management officers have been achieved to a large extent. Accountability is now guaranteed in Nigerian higher educational system leading to an increased quality production of students. Cross fertilization of ideas resulting in better decisions that will reposition the university system towards meeting the technological and world economic challenges in the 21st Century is being achieved through Committee System of Nigerian Universities.

### **Problems facing Committee System in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria**

There are many challenges facing the operation of committee system in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. Some of these challenges include; inadequate funding, overlapping membership, frequent cancellation of meetings, delay in the decision-making process, non-implementations of committees recommendation and bias in selection of committee members.

#### **Inadequate Funding**

The issue of poor funding has been a great hindrance for administrators in Nigerian universities particularly in State universities. It is quite an uphill task to operate any system without adequate funds. It leads to frustration and non-accomplishment of the task, but if money is made available and well managed, then the committee system will work effectively and the objectives will be met. Ogbogu (2013) noted that committees are hampered by lack of adequate funds to facilitate their activities. This is because of the huge human and material resources needed for effective committee practice. Time availability for committee members to attend crucial meetings is an added problem. In some universities, committee members decry poor provision of logistics by the university authorities to enable them to carry out their functions effectively. Ogunode, Josiah, & Ajape (2021); Ogunode, Akinlade & Musa (2021); Ogunode (2020); Ogbonnaya (2009) also noted that the issue of poor funding has been a great hindrance for administrators in Nigerian universities, particularly in state universities. Okotoni, & Adegbami, (2013) did a study that assessed the use and the performance of committees in the decision-making process as well as identified the challenges facing the committee system in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The study revealed that challenges facing the committee system include: inadequate funding, increased workload for the members, delay in paper circulation, division among committee members and limited time for the committees to work. Others included the loyalty of members to their constituencies and the inability to form a quorum.

#### **Low Commitment of Members**

Another problem hindering the effectiveness of committees in tertiary institutions is the poor attitude of committee members towards committees' functions and assignments. Nwoku (2009) identified some weaknesses of the committee system in Nigerian higher institutions including time and resource wastages. Alabi, Mustapha & Abdulkareem (2012) also noted that some committee members are not committed to the vision and mission of the university; they therefore hardly attend meetings while some perpetually go late to such meetings where vital decisions that will move the university forward are made. Ogbomida, Obano, & Emmanuel, (2013) observed that a major challenge to committee system of governance in Nigerian universities is the issue of some committee members are not committed to the vision and mission of the university system include poor attendance of meetings while some members are goes late to

meetings where vital decisions that will move the university forward are taken. The voices of dissension among committee members at meetings also affect efficiency of university administrative decisions. Alabi, Mustapha and AbduKareem (2012), opined that the responsibility for a committee's decision is too fluid with no single specific person bearing it.

### **Overlapping Membership**

The problem of overlapping membership in different committees is hindering the effectiveness of the committee system in tertiary institutions. It has been observed that some people served in more than one committee and this affects their full participation in committees' assignments. A situation where an individual is serving in two or more committees at the same time affects his/her punctuality and commitment. NOUN (2012) submitted that overlapping membership of some committees and pre-occupation of committee members. As such meetings may not form a quorum, which often results in the cancellation and postponement of meetings.

### **Frequent Cancellation of Meetings**

Frequent cancellation of meetings by the Vice Chancellor or chairmen of committees is affecting the development of committee system in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. It is clear that many meetings have been called off because the Vice Chancellor was not around to attend. The inability of the Vice Chancellor or the chairmen of committees to attend scheduled meeting some time kills the moral of other committee members. This actions and practices of cancelling meetings is discouraging committee members and reducing their moral. NOUN (2012) opined that frequent cancellation of meetings by the Vice-Chancellor due to conflict of engagements within the university or the fact that the Vice- Chancellor travels or deliberate manipulation by the chairman to discuss certain issue, or due to other reasons connected with the chairman. Ahaotu, Ogunode, & Ayisa (2021) did a study and discovered that challenges confronting the committee system to include the Vice-Chancellors chairing too many committees; unfair representation of non-academic staff; frequency of meetings and large financial expenditure.

### **Delay in the Decision-Making process**

Another major challenge of the committee system in the administration of the higher institutions in Nigeria is the issue of delay in the decision-making process. Ogbomida<sup>1</sup>, Obano, & Emmanuel, (2013) stated that a major challenge to committee system of governance in Nigerian universities is the issue of delay in decision making process. Alabi et al (2012) opined that some committee members are not committed to the vision and mission of the university. They also noted that the responsibility for a committee's decision is too fluid with no single person bearing it.

### **Non-Implementations of Committees Decisions**

Non-implementation of decision/recommendations of committees set up in the tertiary institutions is a major challenge hindering the development of committee system. Ogbonida et al (2013) noted some university authorities flagrantly reject the decisions of some committees when such recommendation/decisions do not promote the Council or Vice-chancellor's interest. Poor implementation of committee's recommendations does not motivate active participation of all. Ezeigbo, (2016) conducted a study that investigated the utilization of the committee system in the administration of state universities. The result of the study committee decision/recommendations are sometimes not implemented, lack of funds constitute a big hindrance, that committee chairmen and members lack skills in group dynamics, group management and democratic leadership style, that committees lack basic infrastructure for effective performance of their functions.

### **Bias in Selection of Committee Members**

The problem hindering the effective committee system in the tertiary in Nigeria is that the process of committee membership selection is plagued with bias. Many Vice Chancellor appoint their friends as the chairman and member of committees in the various higher institutions.

Ogbonida et al (2013) noted that the election or appointment of committee members is usually at the whims and caprices of the university authorities. Ogbonida et al (2013), noted that other challenges of the committee system include the appointment of personal friends to the authorities into membership of committees which results in compromising standards, quality of work and high expectations and worst of all robs off the genuineness and sincerity of committee system to university growth and development. Musa (2015) opined that appointment of personal friends as committee members always put off merit in the appointment of committee members in the higher institutions. Ogbonida et al stated that standards, quality of work and high expectations are compromised whenever people who do not possess both technical and special skills and genuine love for the aspiration of the university are appointed to serve in critical committees like finance and appropriation, security, students' disciplinary committee, sports and tender board.

## Way Forward

**Adequate Funding:** Adequate funds should be provided for committees to carry out their assignments. Femi (2013) concluded that adequate funding of committees is very critical to the success of the committees. It makes the committees to work without stress.

**Capacity Building Programme:** There should be training programme for all committee members in the tertiary institutions. The training should cover confidentiality of report, report writing skills, accountability, and team work. This will help to increase committee effectiveness in the tertiary institutions and solve the problem of low participation, indiscipline, corruption and poor decision making.

**Selection based on Merit:** Committee members should be selected based on experiences and qualification and what the person can offer not on personal grounds. Femi (2013) recommended that vice-chancellor and senate should strive to appoint or select only people with proven integrity, skilled and experienced in democratic team leadership as committee chairmen and members. Julian & Alastair (2013) noted that care should be taken in the selection of committee members to ensure that they merit the membership of the committees they are appointed into in terms of expertise, qualifications and experience.

**Implementation of Committee Report:** School administrators should ensure committee recommendations are looked into objectively and ensure implementation. This will encourage members to do more. Nwoku (2009) also revealed that effectiveness of the committee system could be enhanced if the committee decisions are implemented.

## Conclusion

The committee system in university administration is here to stay and has been proven to be effective and democratic in nature, allowing for diverse perspectives in decision-making. However, it is beset by a slew of obstacles that limit its effectiveness. These challenges, however, are surmountable with adequate funding, a level playing field for all, and effective implementation of all committee recommendations.

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